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Frame of Mind Self Industry in Performance

Introduction

So this meeting – which has just opened – is an international colloquium.... Generous hospitality. Invited guests?... And all these problems of identity, as we so foolishly say nowadays.¹

The above quotation from Jacques Derrida about the topic of an international conference in Louisiana, or rather a supplement to Derrida (as I have added to it an extra tense, ellipsis and a new context), seems a perfect sketch of what I would like to discuss, namely *Sketches about Ophelia*, a new performance by Teatr A Part, involving “all these problems of,” mind you, neither identity nor self, but identification and self industry, themselves supplements to the infamous identity and self.

In fact, the very word “sketch” – “a hasty, undetailed drawing or painting often made as a preliminary study” – necessitates the logic of supplement. It is like the three dots of ellipsis, which need a complement to make up for what is missing. Not unlike Marcin Herich’s *Sketches*. After all, they are a monodrama and a solo performance by Monika Wachowicz as Ophelia, and thus an obvious ellipsis of Hamlet as a character. Furthermore, the elliptical title in the plural suggests more than one ellipsis and calls for more than one supplement. This plurality seems to be no coincidence. Because the supplement acts, in fact, like a self-producing virus. As Derrida puts it: “It is impossible to arrest

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 14.

it, domesticate it, tame it.”² Most importantly, its virulence has serious implications for self and identity, which implications become conspicuous in Herich’s performance (therefore *Sketches* are referred to in plural), and not only in Ophelia’s case.

Self-Productive Liminality

Interestingly enough, in order to analyse the self-producing strategy of supplement, Derrida turns to art (which will be discussed further in the text). In the book *The Truth in Painting*, he observes: “It [supplement] is first of all on the border.”³ And this border is quite problematical to Derrida; there seems to be nothing more difficult to determine. Derrida uses a painting frame as an example. Most importantly, all of his argument is also illustrative of Herich’s supplement necessitating *Sketches*, themselves, perhaps, not a *work* but an *event* of art and a form of painting, too – a kind of action painting, in fact. Not totally unlike Jackson Pollock’s paintings. But let us stick to the frame, if that is possible, because:

Where does the frame take place. Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between two limits.⁴

“The frame is essentially fragile,” Derrida concludes. It is in its essence to be unsettled by the supplement if the latter is to do its job and supply the inside from the outside. Therefore Derrida arrives at a final conclusion that the frame is actually “the decisive structure” of the supplement. For this reason, “there is no natural frame... the frame does not exist.”⁵ And a frame of mind is no exception. It leaves mind frameless.

Accordingly, the frame can be neither inside nor outside. It is in between. Split. It seems that an Ophelia-like split personality disorder, or “disorder of identity,”⁶ the phrase that Derrida juxtaposes to the “foolish” concept of identity, is a common frame of mind.

² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 157.

³ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 53.

⁴ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

⁶ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 14.

By the same token, *Sketches about Ophelia* are nothing but a borderline performance. And it is the continual collision and disruption of different frames in *Sketches* that makes them both transgressive and self-producing. It all begins with the constant oscillation between the frame of a ritual and that of a spectacle in *Sketches*.

Herich's performance is a spectacle by virtue of its story line (based on the figure of Ophelia), which seduces the audience into watching it. And what makes it ritualistic in the first place is its transformative power. Transformation is the very essence of a ritual. Most importantly, according to Arnold Van Gennep, the author of *Rites of Passage*, transformation in a ritual is self-production per se. It leads people into "a 'second reality,' separate from ordinary life. This reality is where people become ... selves other than their daily selves. Thus ritual ... transform[s] people,"⁷ to quote Richard Schechner, a performance theorist (ritual is a kind of performance) and a performer himself.

Interestingly, transformation in a ritual takes place right on the border, just like Derrida's supplementation and Wachowicz's performance. In ritual studies and in performance theory, this border is called "limen." Victor Turner, in his *Ritual Process* and *From Ritual to Theatre*, argues that the relationship between limen and transformation as well as self-production is not accidental: "It is as though, ... liminal entities ... betwixt and between the positions ... assigned by law, custom, convention and ceremonial ... are being reduced or ground down ... to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers."⁸ That is to say, one becomes lawless, powerless, identity-less and self-less when on the margin, and therefore one stands in desperate need of supplementation. Not unlike Wachowicz and her audience.

In fact, borderline self industry in *Sketches* starts as soon as one reads the title. *Sketches* are exclusively about Ophelia. Separation from the group and from the ordinary space-time (in this case, from the other characters and from the play itself, as well as from the theatrical stage) is a prerequisite for self-transformation in a ritual. That is to say, Ophelia undergoes the pre-liminal phase of a ritual already in the title. The title of Herich's performance is thus performative, to use John Austin's term. That is, it effects Ophelia's exclusion, which triggers a series of self-transformations involving both the performer and the audience of *Sketches*.

⁷ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 52

⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Aldin Transaction. A Division of Transaction Publishers, 2009), 66

Spectators and Self-Producing Role Reversal

The spectators sit in two rows facing each other; the stage – a black rectangular frame on the floor – is in the middle. In fact, the spectators frame the stage. Wachowicz comes from behind them, that is, from the outside, crosses the black rectangular frame on the floor and goes inside. This constitutes a symbolic attack on the framed integrity of both the audience and the performer. *Sketches* are no longer limited to the stage and to the fictive world. As a consequence, everybody gets out of their assigned roles and selves.

Traditionally, the role of a theatregoer is considered to be that of a passive observer. However, in *Sketches* the frameless spectators get transformed into performers. It is the spectators who are observed, at first, by the other spectators sitting in the opposite row, and then by Wachowicz. After crossing the frame, Wachowicz walks slowly along the rows and looks directly at each spectator. Wachowicz takes time to examine every single face. She smiles at some, frowns at others or wonders, and deliberately turns towards or away from some individual audience members. Most importantly, the spectators actively respond to her provoking behaviour. They smile back and frown back. They also initiate actions on their own and provoke Wachowicz's reactions. Thus, everybody becomes involved in the performance, although to indeterminate degrees and in indeterminate capacities. That is to say, Herich's performance takes place on yet one more boundary, namely the one between subject and object. In borderline *Sketches*, the subject and object are no longer dichotomous but oscillatory. Do the involved spectators establish a relationship among themselves and Wachowicz as equal participants, as co-subjects, or do they, by initiating interaction with the artist and provoking her spontaneous responses, turn her into an object, or do they, perhaps, act as her puppets?

There are no definite answers to the questions about the selfhood and hierarchical status of all the participants in *Sketches*. Actually, *Sketches* repeat after Derrida that all these questions of identity are, in fact, out of question. Herich's performance is, first of all, process-oriented. It is not an *object* of art for interpretation but an open-ended, unpredictable and uncontrollable, to some degree, *event* for participation.

Thus, Herich's performance proves to be again like Derrida's supplement: "threatening ... and ... critical." It plunges its participants into a crisis (a series of liminal situations) that cannot be overcome by referring to their traditional roles. They must constantly redefine themselves, which "exacts a price"⁹ – a stable self price. At one point in *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida compares the experience of supplement to playing "Russian roulette ... which can make one lose one's head suddenly."¹⁰ Who can *embody* that better if not Ophelia?

⁹ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

Performer and Embodied Self Industry

Just after crossing the frame, Wachowicz does a short warm-up and some stretching, and drinks a brand of mineral water called Nałęczowianka. Definitely, Wachowicz is not playing Ophelia at Elsinore. Actually, she is not playing anybody. Wachowicz is using her *real* body, which imposes itself on the audience with its open physicality and sensuality throughout the whole performance. The actions that she carries out do not simply mean “drinking,” “working out” or “stretching”; they accomplish precisely what they signify. They are self-referent, and therefore self-producing. In short, they are performative, to use Judith Butler’s term for self-producing body acts. In other words, Wachowicz violates the relationship between the corporeal and semiotic, and turns her body into a performer; and the performing body, given agency, neither expresses nor represents self – be it Ophelia’s or Wachowicz’s self. Instead, it produces a singular self. To adapt Judith Butler, one *is not* simply a self, but one *does* one’s self. An embodied self, or an “embodied mind,”¹¹ in the words of Erika Fischer-Lichte. “A hybrid of outside and inside ... which is not a mixture or a half measure,”¹² to quote Derrida on supplement, but a singular entity.

The emphasis on the performative potential of the human body is no accident in *Sketches*. Teatr A Part is a physical theatre. In its performances, the human body is never in the state of being but always in permanent transformation, or self-production. And it is no coincidence either that there are two versions of *Sketches* – verbal and non-verbal. The latter version foregrounds the performativity of the body and the violation of the relationship between the corporeal and semiotic even more.

On the other hand, it is not impossible – in fact, it is quite plausible – to refer Wachowicz’s de-semioticized drinking of the mineral water to Ophelia’s drowning in the brook. Thus, *Sketches* constantly oscillate between Ophelia, Wachowicz and self-producing ellipsis of Wachowicz and Ophelia. Furthermore, *Sketches* as a ritual make extensive use of symbols and thus allow the performer and the spectators to set diverse interpretative frames. Thus, the scene of Ophelia’s crucifixion, linking her body to that of Christ’s, might symbolize embodied self performance; in the figure of Christ, the opposition between matter and spirit collapses. Christ’s body is both flesh and spirit. In other words, it is an embodied self, or en-selfed body. Embodied self grows even more symbolic thanks to back-lighting. The *Contre-jour* technique causes Wachowicz’s body, in a dazzling white costume, to emanate brightness. Her whole physicality is as if produced by inte-

¹¹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, ed. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008), 82.

¹² Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 63–64.

rior shining of a spirit, or self. This results in what Arthur Danto calls “the Transfiguration of the Commonplace”;¹³ corporeal becomes spiritual in *Sketches*.

The frustrating oscillation between semiotic (symbolic) and desemiotized (non-symbolic) induces what Fischer-Lichte calls a perceptual multistability. The perception constantly shifts in *Sketches* as the spectators are in no position to name the performing self. Thus, to adapt Derrida’s phrase for Shakespeare: “the theatre of the impossible,” *Sketches about Ophelia* are a performance of the impossible. And while *Romeo and Juliet* is, in Derrida’s words, “theatre of the name,”¹⁴ *Sketches* are theatre of naming, or self industry.

Performance and Self Industry

Most importantly in the context of *The Self Industry* conference, general participation in *Sketches* makes it difficult to speak of producers and receivers in the performance. Rather, the performance produces the spectators and the performers. Furthermore, through their unpredictable and uncontrollable actions, Wachowicz and the involved spectators constitute an ever-changing feedback loop, which in turn produces the performance itself.¹⁵ This makes *Sketches* self-producing: self-productive and self-produced at once. Both a producer and a product, *Sketches* are then an aesthetic example of autopoiesis.

Autopoiesis is a biological term for the self-producing operations of living systems. While all other kinds of systems produce something different, autopoietic systems are at once producers and products. Our body cells are an example of this dynamic and so are *Sketches*.

As embodied selves, we are involved in autopoiesis continuously in our being in the world. So what’s the point of intensifying that in our free time and not for free? It seems that autopoiesis is so common that we lose sight and touch of it, and, by the same token, of its unbounded potential. Herich’s performance, through its structural, formal and technical means, animates and directs our attention to autopoiesis, or self industry, if you wish. “Self” suddenly becomes self-less. A sketch. Perhaps sketches. Not unlike Derrida’s supplement, which is “exceptional, strange, extraordinary.”¹⁶ Thus, Herich’s performance “reenchants”

¹³ Arthur Coleman Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 281.

¹⁴ Derrida, “Aphorism Countertime,” in Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 425–26.

¹⁵ Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power*, 59.

¹⁶ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 57.

self, to use Fischer-Lichte's term.¹⁷ It transfigures the commonplace. It seems that Herich, not unlike Derrida, "painstakingly effaces any ... familiarity, defamiliarizes what seemed 'normal', producing a radical transformation or 'deformation' of what we might have thought was the 'original' concept under the discussion."¹⁸ In this case, self is defamiliarized. Derrida and Herich make it clear: there is no self. There is self industry. And the latter always involves adding on, complementing, being in place of and role reversing; "we are (always) (still) to be invented,"¹⁹ as Derrida puts it. Thus, the time might be set right in joint, and Ophelia become a record-breaking long-distance swimmer or a happily married Mrs. Hamlet. Austin's *infelicitous* performatives? No. Dollan's *utopian* performatives? Yes, indeed. To quote Jill Dolan, who coined the term and introduced it into performance theory, Herich's performance "lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense."²⁰ And, according to Derrida, "the impossible happens"²¹ thanks to Herich. For Derrida's supplement is like a dramatic character in a text – an incomplete human being, a sketch, which needs a supplement itself. This might be the reason for Derrida's recourse to art in *The Truth in Painting* while analysing supplement.

According to Victor Schklovsky's definition of art: "art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things."²² That is to say, Herich's performance gives genuine flesh to Derrida's supplement: the bodily co-presence of the performer and the involved spectators. This brings Derrida's supplement alive and makes the participants in the performance re-enchanted with its virulence, or self industry.

Initially, my intention was to explore self industry in terms of body acts. However, I decided to expand the scope and explore it in terms of performance. This seems to comply with the logic of supplement; a writer can never have complete control over what he or she writes. The writer can always say "more, less or something other than what he would mean."²³ The writer is always taken by surprise, or self industry, if you wish. "There is always a secret of 'me' for 'me,'"²⁴

¹⁷ Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power*, 181.

¹⁸ Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 49.

¹⁹ Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," in Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 342.

²⁰ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance. Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 5.

²¹ Derrida, "Aphorism," 420.

²² Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (The University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

²³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

²⁴ 23 Derrida, "Dialanguages," trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Points... Interviews, 1974–94*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 134.

as Derrida puts it. "We know what we are, but know not what we may be," in Ophelia's very words. After all, "the owl was a baker's daughter,"²⁵ which is basically what *Sketches* and self industry are all about.

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Act 4, Scene 5) (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2002), 120.

Monika Gorzelak

W ramach „ja”

Strzeszczenie

Przedmiotem refleksji w artykule jest spektakl Teatru A Part pt. *Szkice o Ofelii*. Do analizy spektaklu wykorzystano figurę suplementu w rozumieniu Jacques'a Derridy oraz związane z nią pojęcie limenu z teorii performance'u.

Idea szkicu z definicji wymaga uzupełnienia, które Derrida lokuje na granicy. Tym samym naruszona przez suplement granica zostaje podana w wątpliwość. Niemożność jej ustalenia dotyczy również jaźni, czego przykład stanowią właśnie *Szkice...*, a ściślej: stanowią one przykład performance'u borderline. *Szkice...* stawiają bowiem pod znakiem zapytania wszelkie ramy, generując tym samym coraz to nowe „ja”. Nieustannie oscylują między przedstawieniem teatralnym i rytuałem, który prowadzi do transformacji, problematyzują relację podmiot–przedmiot, znaczący–znaczony, duchowy–materialny itd. Co jednak najistotniejsze, *Szkice...* unieważniają podział na widzów i aktorów; *Szkice...* to nie *dzieło*, a *wydarzenie sztuki*. Dzięki sprzężeniu zwrotnemu, każdy z uczestników ma realny wpływ na ich przebieg. *Szkice...*, będąc zarazem produktem i producentem jaźni, stanowią estetyczny przykład *autopoiesis* – nie ma „ja”, a co pozostaje to produkcja „ja”.

Monika Gorzelak

Dans le cadre du « moi »

Résumé

Le spectacle du Théâtre A Part intitulé *Szkice o Ofelii* (*Esquisses sur Ophélie*) est l'objet d'analyse dans le présent article. Pour analyser le spectacle, on s'est servi de la figure de supplément selon l'avis de Jacques Derrida et de la notion de *limen* – liée à cette figure – de la théorie de performance.

L'idée de l'esquisse exige par définition un complément que Derrida situe à la frontière. Ainsi, la frontière violée par le supplément est révoquée en doute. L'impossibilité de déterminer cette frontière concerne aussi le Soi, et les *Esquisses...* en constituent un exemple ; et plus précisément, elles constituent un exemple de la performance borderline. Les *Esquisses...* remettent en question tous les cadres en générant ainsi le nouveau « moi » qui ne cesse d'évoluer. Elles oscillent constamment entre le spectacle théâtral et le rituel qui aboutit à la transformation, problématique.

sent la relation sujet-objet, signifiant-signifié, spirituel-matériel, etc. Ce qui est le plus important, c'est que les *Esquisses...* annulent la division en spectateurs et acteurs ; les *Esquisses...* ne sont pas une *œuvre*, mais un *événement* artistique. Grâce à la rétroaction, chacun des participants a une influence réelle sur leur déroulement. Les *Esquisses...*, étant à la fois le produit et le producteur du Soi, constituent un exemple esthétique *autopoiesis* – il n'y a pas de « moi », et ce qui reste c'est une production du « moi ».